

The John Immel House: A Lost and Forgotten Lebanon County Landmark

by Randy Jaye

The John Immel House was built in 1814 in present-day Jackson Township, and is currently one of 31 Lebanon County structures active on the National Register of Historic Places.

On a side note, there are scores of other structures in Lebanon County, including the Mann Building, Samler Building, Stoy House, Kettering House and the Weigley Mansion that would most likely qualify for the NRHP, but have yet to be successfully nominated.

The John Immel House is perhaps the most mysterious of all historic structures in the Lebanon County area because no pictures, articles or mention of this nationally recognized landmark have appeared online or in print for several decades.

The John Immel House was designed in the Pennsylvania German Traditional architecture style and listed on the NRHP on April 17, 1980 for its architectural significance as an early nineteenth-century farmhouse constructed of locally quarried limestone and displaying superb master masonry work.

It was strategically built near the Union Canal towpath by the Immel family, descendants of original German Palatine immigrants. The Immel family was influential in the local area during the early nineteenth-century in religious activities, governmental functions and business dealings.

Pennsylvania German traditional architecture

Early German (Deutsch) speaking people who settled in Pennsylvania, starting in the early 1700s, originated mostly from central Europe and brought cultural, religious and architectural traditions with them. Many of these people became known as the



John Immel House featured exquisite limestone masonry work - southeast view - ca. 1978. (Public Domain NRHP).

“Pennsylvania Dutch,” which was due to the mispronunciation of “Deutch” as “Dutch.” The southeastern section of Pennsylvania has the largest number of surviving early Pennsylvania German traditional style buildings, including the rare and nationally acclaimed Heinrich Zeller House (Fort Zeller) near Newmanstown, which was built in 1745.

The John Immel House was a near picture-perfect example of Pennsylvania German Traditional architecture, as it possessed most of the identifiable features of the style including a steep pitched gable roof, thick stone wall and brick construction, four-over-four front facade design, dual gable end chimneys, and two-and-one-half stories.

The National Register of Historic Places

The National Park Service defines the National Register of Historic Places as, “The official list of the Nation’s historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service’s National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to

coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources."

Description of the John Immel house

The John Immel House was a two-and-one-half story, L-shaped farmhouse with thick outer walls constructed of solid limestone. The structure's main section measured 32 feet long by 32 feet wide and included four rooms on each of the first and second levels. Its smaller section measured 18 feet long by 18 feet wide and included one room on the first level and a small storage room on the second level. The structure included a full basement under both sections, and a one room attic above the main section.

The structure's most striking feature was its exquisite early nineteenth-century master masonry workmanship, which included large limestone quoins (masonry blocks at the corners of the external walls), and non-uniformly shaped limestone building blocks intricately fitted together in an alluring random pattern.

The steep gable roof on the main section of the structure was covered with wood shingles and included two brick chimneys at the edges of the peaks. White painted wood eaves at the roof line extended the length of the front, eastern and back sections of the structure.

The south facing front facade featured a classically designed main entranceway with a full pediment (decorative triangular gable over the doorway) and an unusual fan-shaped top transom (strengthening crossbar). The entranceway's exterior was finished with white painted wood molding. A single solid wood entrance door was recessed within the door jamb.

There were three first-floor level, double hung, two over two windows, and four second-floor level, double hung, 12 over 8 windows. All of the windows had white painted wood frames and featured wide wooden keystone-shaped lintels (structural supports above the windows). A date stone was centered between the second-floor level windows set in an arch-shaped piece of limestone.



John Immel House included an arched-top date stone centered between the second-floor windows - ca. 1978. (Public Domain NRHP).

A Pennsylvania Dutch motif and the words, "Build [sic] by John and Elizabeth Immel 1814," were hand-chiseled into the date stone. A brick arched lintel spanned the top arch of the date stone.

The east facing side featured three first-floor level, double hung, two over two windows, four second-floor level, double hung, 12 over 8 windows and two attic-level, double hung, two over two windows. A small wood-framed entrance porch with a shed roof covered with wood shingles was supported by square wood columns.

The north facing side featured two first-floor level, double hung, two over two windows on the smaller section, and two first-floor level, double hung, two over two windows and two second-floor level, double hung, 12 over 8 windows on the main section.

The west facing side featured one first-floor level, double hung, two over two window on the smaller section, and two first-floor level, double hung, two over two windows, two second-floor level, double hung, 12 over 8 windows and two attic-level, double hung, two over two, windows on the main section. First-floor level wood floor joists were exposed through the exterior limestone walls.

Quest to Locate the John Immel House

Based on photographs taken during a Lebanon County Architectural Survey in 1978, I knew what the structure looked like. From the NRHP nomination form I also knew the general area where it was located (simply identified as east of Myerstown on Flanagan Road).

After driving the length of Flanagan Road several times, and looking everywhere along the landscape, I could not locate the house. I then started talking to neighbors, but no one seemed to know anything about it. Finally, a young Mennonite man told me that local folklore talks of an old limestone house that once stood in the area, but it caught on fire and disappeared many years ago.

I then contacted the Lebanon County Tax Assessment Office and asked for assistance. Michael Chapin, data analysis clerk, conducted some research based

on information provided on the NRHP nomination form. Chapin was able to find where the structure was located on the county's mapping system by converting the Universal Transverse Mercator to decimal degrees (Latitude 40.367 and Longitude -76.272). He also determined the John Immel House was present on maps from 1940 and 1970, but was missing from the most recent 2016 aerial map. He also determined that the current parcel where it sat is now known as 138 Flanagan Road. Notes in the county records also indicated that during a site visit in 2000 to view a new house built on this parcel it was recorded that an older building (John Immel House) on the property was no longer standing.

Armed with this information, I visited the current owners of 138 Flanagan Road and they confirmed that an old house (John Immel House) once stood on their property, but was gone prior to them building their new house and moving onto the property in 2000.

Aerial photo from Lebanon County Tax Assessment Office



An aerial photograph taken in 2016 showing the location (red circle) where the John Immel House once stood. (Lebanon County Tax Assessment Office).

Fate of the John Immel House

Around 1990, after standing for approximately 175 years, the John Immel House suffered significant fire damage and was then demolished without a recorded demolition permit. Since the National Park Service was never notified of its demolition it currently remains listed as 'active' on the NRHP.

The mystery of where the John Immel House was located and what happened to it is finally solved. Today, there are no remnants of it above ground and the area it once sat on is grown over with vegetation.

Location where the John Immel House once stood is now a vacant field. (Photograph taken September 16, 2021 by Randy Jaye) RECTANGLE ADDED.



Delisting the John Immel House from the NRHP

In September 2021, a petition was sent to the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office in Harrisburg to start the process of delisting the John Immel House from the NRHP. The National Park Service will most likely officially delist it sometime in 2022.

The John Immel House is yet another example of a centuries old, and once impressive, nationally recognized historic landmark that is now lost to history.

John Immel House - west view - ca. 1978. (Public Domain NRHP).

